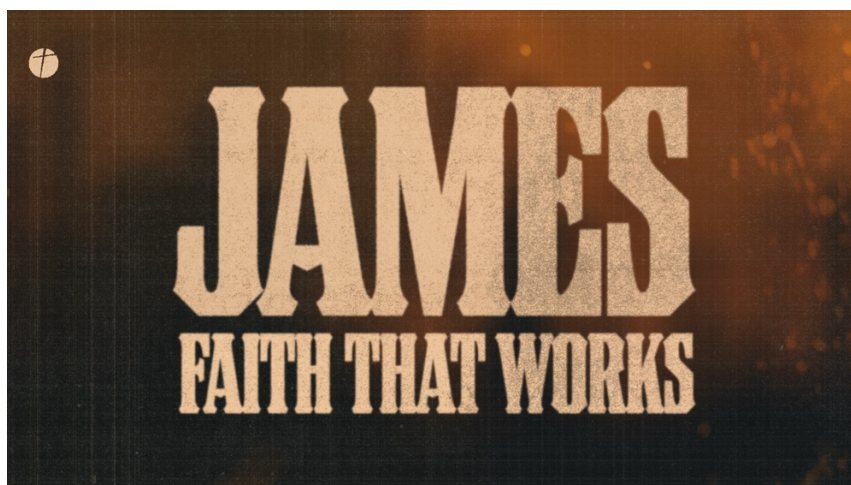




James: Faith That Works

Week 1: How to Win on the Road

Leader tip: *This is week one of a new series in James, a book about faith that actually shows up in how we live. James opens with trials, which nearly everyone in your group is facing in some form. We've given you a good range of options so you can choose what fits your group. You don't have to ask every question. Go gently, let people be honest about hard seasons, and keep pointing them to the God who meets us in the fire.*

MESSAGE SUMMARY

James, the brother of Jesus, once thought Jesus was out of His mind. But the risen Christ appeared to him, and James went from skeptic to servant, writing the first letter in the New Testament to believers scattered and away from home. His big idea: faith is not proven by what we say, it is revealed by how we live. He opens with trials, and the picture the sermon draws is a road game. We are away from home, in hostile territory, and we can still win. Winning takes the right mindset, choosing joy as an act of the will. It takes expecting trials rather than being surprised by them, and even enlisting them, because God uses trials to refine us and grow us. It takes refusing to blame God, letting Him shape how we see our circumstances rather than the other way around. And it takes praying for wisdom, which God gives generously and without finding fault.

KEY SCRIPTURE

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:2-4 NIV

WARM UP

- Are you more of a home turf person who likes the comforts of routine, or someone who comes alive in new and challenging situations?
- When life gets difficult, are you more likely to push through, shut down, or reach out to others?
- What is the best piece of advice you have ever gotten for getting through a tough season?

THINK IT THROUGH

- The sermon pointed out that James once thought his own brother was out of His mind (Mark 3:21), yet after seeing the risen Jesus he called himself “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” What does that kind of turnaround tell you about who Jesus can reach and change?
- The sermon said the church is scattered and “we are not home,” playing life like a road game in hostile territory. How does remembering that this world is not our home change the way we handle its difficulties?
- Read James 1:2-4. James says to consider it pure joy when we face trials. Notice he says consider, an act of the mind, not a feeling we manufacture. What is the difference between choosing joy and simply pretending to be happy?
- The sermon said trials are the inevitable, unavoidable, and often unpredictable parts of life, and that unrealistic expectations make life frustrating. How does simply expecting trials, rather than being surprised by them, change the way we walk through them?
- James says the testing of our faith produces perseverance, and perseverance makes us “mature and complete, not lacking anything.” What is the connection between going through hard things and actually growing up in our faith?

OPEN UP

- The sermon offered three ways to respond to trials: escape them, endure them, or enlist them. Think about a trial you are walking through or recently walked through. Which of those three have you been doing, and what might it look like to enlist it instead?
- James says the testing of our faith is like refining metal, meant to get things out of us that need to go and build things in us that need to grow. Looking back, where have you seen a hard season produce something in you that an easy season never could?
- The sermon said we cannot let our circumstances shape the way we view our God; we must let our God shape the way we view our circumstances. When trials come, which direction do you tend to drift, and what helps you turn back toward trusting who God is?
- Read James 1:5-8. God promises wisdom to those who ask, generously and without finding fault. Where do you most need wisdom right now, and is there anything that keeps you from simply asking Him for it?

TAKE A STEP

- This week, name one trial you are facing and ask God for the wisdom to know the next right thing to do, and the courage to actually do it. Write down what you sense Him showing you.
- Practice choosing joy in the middle of something hard. Each day, before you look at your circumstances, take a moment to remember what God has given you in Christ and thank Him for it.
- Please remember to sign-up your group to serve one date this semester in Preschool or Children’s Ministry! There are multiple serving opportunities throughout each week on Sundays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays to accommodate groups who prefer to serve outside of normal group times. Thank you for investing in the next generation!



Group Leader Serve Form

PRAYER

Father, thank You that You meet us right in the middle of our trials, just as You met James and changed his life. Thank You that we can choose joy, not because everything is easy, but because You are with us and You are good. Help us to expect trials without fear, to trust that You are refining us through them, and to run to You for wisdom instead of blaming You in the hard seasons. Give us wisdom to know the next right thing and the courage to do it. In Jesus' name, amen.